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Lehigh anthropology professor Allison Mickel speaks to a crowd gathered in solidarity for Palestine on Nov. 9, 2023. (Liana Secondino/B&W Staff)

Demonstration in support of Palestine draws mixed reactions

BY EDWARD FUHRER, LIANA SECONDINO AND SAM BARNEY-GIBBS — ; PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 9, 2023, 3:22 PM ; **UPDATED NOVEMBER 14, 2023, 2:14 AM** NEWS

Over 200 students and community members gathered on the STEPS lawn Thursday, Nov. 9, to show their solidarity for Palestine as the Israel-Hamas conflict continues. The Student Political Action Committee and Lehigh4Palestine organized the demonstration.

The demonstration started at 1 p.m. and encouraged students to walk out of their classes.

At around 2:30 p.m., the group marched and chanted from the STEPS lawn to the flagpole in front of the University Center. Guest speaker and Palestinian-born writer Raya Abdelaal and others then led another round of chants. The students then returned to the STEPS lawn and dispersed just after 3 p.m.

The demonstration drew mixed reactions due to some statements and signage presented by some demonstrators.

Jennah Abdelaziz, '24, spoke at the demonstration and said condemning a political movement and a governmental body should not be equated to condemning a religious group.

"We have many Jewish allies among us today and across the globe who do not identify with the state of Israel and Zionism, who are fighting for Palestinian life and liberation alongside us," Abdelaziz said.

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Nathan wrote in an email following the demonstration on Friday that Lehigh "feels just a little less safe and a little less welcoming than it did just a little over a day ago." He wrote that he thought the rally contained antisemitic statements and made some Jewish students uncomfortable.

He wrote that the message on the signs — "Zionism is murder" — applies to all Zionists, in his opinion, even those who wish for an independent Palestinian state, such as himself and many Jewish students on campus.

Buitrago wrote that the anti-Zionist sentiments are not antisemitic, and he believes asserting such reduces Jewish identity and is an "attack on freedom of speech."

"The idea that a state that elevates Judaism over other groups is necessary for the protection and self-determination of Jews is offensive to our Jewish organizers and many Jews globally," Buitrago wrote.

Nathan also wrote that the sentiment of the chant — "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" — can only become true if Israel no longer exists.

"To state that Jews cannot live as free people in their ancestral homeland is de facto an anti-Semitic statement," Nathan wrote.

A group of leaders from Chabad at Lehigh wrote an email to University President Joseph Helble, '82, on Nov. 10 in response to rising antisemitism on Lehigh's campus, and they specifically referred to the chant.

The Chabad leaders wrote that they think this is a rallying cry for terrorist groups and their sympathizers, but they wrote it is also often used by pro-Palestinian activists as a call to arms. They wrote that it calls for the erasure of the Israeli state and its people.

"Since the founding of Chabad at Lehigh, Dit (Greenberg) and I have never witnessed organized, proud displays of blatant antisemitism on campus," the email reads. "This by far is the greatest public display of antisemitism and Anti-Israel sentiment that Lehigh has seen in decades."

Buitrago wrote that this chant is used at pro-Palestine protests globally and believes it's not a call for the destruction of Israel or Jewish people, but rather a wish for an end to the inhumane practices and apartheid system imposed by the Israeli government on the Palestinian people.

Though the statements may not have been intended to be antisemitic, Nathan wrote that he is "unsure" if it is and called on the university to condemn antisemitism on campus, just as it would condemn bias or prejudice expressed toward other groups.

The email from Chabad included claims that the chant violates the university's Policy on Harassment and Non-Discrimination and the Student Code of Conduct.

In an email to the campus community sent Sunday, Nov. 12, Helble wrote that though the demonstration was peaceful, some behaviors and signage at the demonstration contained

Tweets from @LUBrownWhite

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@LUBrownWhite · 52m

"I was drawn to this position because I love working with undergraduates," Austin said. "I love helping students. I love helping students who maybe even struggle with some of the similar things that I (did), like, 'I have no idea what I want to study.'"

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Kelly Austin inspires students through ...

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@LUBrownWhite · 4h

McQuilken led Lehigh to a 20-13-1 record and threw for nearly 7,000 career yards across three seasons before heading to the NFL and eventually becoming an executive vice president at Cartoon Network.

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Editorial: Are Lehigh police a private ...

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 13

The NBA is back! With basketball soon to be on TV nearly every night, you may wonder: which team should I watch? What can I look forward to this season?

Luckily for you, I'm here to answer these questions by giving you 10 things to watch this NBA season

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Parker's Sports Corner: 10 things to ...

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 13

Social media is bad, we know that. And yet. we can't get off it.

you've caught on...

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addiction makes us ...



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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 13

"(The mayor) was hearing from residents that they love living in the city and they love their neighborhood," Satullo said. "But this park is really sad and (residents) asked if he could do something about it."

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 12

The Brown and White spoke with coach Brett Reed about what to watch out for with Lehigh this year and the current landscape of college basketball.

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 9

"So, we made it into International Voices, which includes everyone," Cusumano said. "There are domestic students, international students, and we have staff and faculty who have contributed to the magazine."

thebrownandwhite.c...
International Voices
magazine invites

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The Brown and White @LUBrownWhite · Nov 9

Lehigh students are faced with a tough decision every election: should they vote in their home state or in Northampton County?

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Students decide whether to vote in ...

The Brown and White @LUBrownWhite · Nov 8

A small amount of mercury was found in a room on the first floor of Iacocca Hall in the C-Wing, according to a HawkWatch alert sent to the campus community Wednesday evening by Jason Schiffer, the assistant vice president of campus safety.

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Amid this artistry, I cannot help but wonder where the sculptures commemorating real Black individuals are. I mean, after all, we have statues of nameless people.

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Edit Desk: Where are all the Black statues?

1

The Brown and White @LUBrownWhite · Nov 8

Lykens was named a first-team Division II All-American twice by the National Field Hockey Coaches Association while playing at West Chester University, where she won two national championships and was conference player of the year in her senior season.

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Lehigh field hockey coach wraps up first ...

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The Brown and White @LUBrownWhite · Nov 8

In a world driven by consumerism and the pursuit of professional success, the

value of friendship often takes a backseat.

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Editorial: Live with your friends and do...

💬 ❤️ 3

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 7

The Lehigh men's basketball team is welcoming four first-years this season: guards Nasir Whitlock, Joshua Ingram, and Cameron Gillus, and forward Jake Pike. The Brown and White sat down with the first-years to discuss their first season at Lehigh.

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Lehigh men's basketball team ...

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 6

Lehigh failed to take advantage of a halftime lead in an 84-78 loss against the Big Red in their season opener Monday night at Stabler Arena.

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Lehigh men's basketball falls to ...

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 5

New Orleans Pelicans guard CJ McCollum, '13, was diagnosed with a collapsed right lung following medical imaging Sunday morning, according to an update from the NBA released at 5 p.m. The Pelicans posted the medical update via X.

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Lehigh alumnus, NBA player diagnosed wi...

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@LUBrownWhite · Nov 4

On a chilly fall afternoon in Goodman Stadium, Lehigh fell in an offensive battle with Holy Cross 28-24.

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Lehigh loses close battle with Holy Cross

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X

President Helble unveiled a \$1.25 billion fundraising goal by 2028 for a new university-wide fundraising initiative, Go Beyond: The Campaign for Future Makers.

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Go Beyond Campaign
seeks \$1.25 billion b...

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antisemitic statements and language and violated Lehigh's Principles of Our Equitable Community.

"For these conversations to be effective, we must consider how words, slogans, chants and actions will be understood by others whose views or whose histories differ from ours," Helble wrote.

Buitrago wrote that he questions why the university does not outwardly condemn the Israeli military in addition to Hamas and is worried the purpose of the demonstration is being misconstrued.

"We are concerned that our beautiful demonstration for peace...is being labeled by some as a hateful demonstration due to the misinterpretation of a single chant," Buitrago wrote.

Abdelaal said she hoped Lehigh students in attendance would question what they see on their social media feeds and evaluate if the information they see is true or not.

She said there is lots of propaganda circulating about this conflict in Israel and Gaza.

"You're going to hear a lot of lies," Abdelaal said. "Fact check what you are hearing and make sure the sources that you're getting it from are factual."

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The newspaper covers Lehigh University news and the surrounding Bethlehem area, and it aims to serve as a platform for conversation and idea exchange.

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